

At last Sturgeon admits failing our school kids

THE First Minister admitted the SNP “must do better” on education – as yet another damning report revealed that thousands of Scottish pupils are being failed.

Nicola Sturgeon revealed yesterday that the curriculum was to be refocused on literacy and numeracy after world experts stepped in to help tackle the crisis in the country's schools.

Her comments came as a new Scottish Parliament report found that pupils with additional support needs are struggling due to a lack of staff and support.

Last week a schools survey found less than half of 13 and 14-year-olds are performing well in writing and in December a major international study saw Scottish schools record their worst ever performance.

Appearing on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show, Ms Sturgeon said: “I've been very open that this is not good enough.”

She revealed that experts from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had been working with the Scottish Government. “They've made

By Ben Borland

certain recommendations to us about how we improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy,” she said.

“Right now we've got a new national improvement framework, we have an attainment challenge, we have an attainment fund putting significant extra resources into education.”

She added: “But we have had some advice that we need to have more of a focus in our curriculum on literacy and numeracy and that's exactly what we're doing right now, so we've introduced new benchmarks for the teaching of literacy and numeracy.”

Scottish Conservative education spokeswoman Liz Smith described Ms Sturgeon's comments as a “tacit admission of failure”.

She said: “After 10 years of SNP control over Scottish education, it is simply not good enough for Nicola Sturgeon to say that improvements will be made by 2021.

“Scottish chil-

Kezia Dugdale called revelation ‘bruising’

dren cannot afford to wait until the next parliament for things to get better.

“It is time for the SNP to put its obsession with independence to one side and get on with tackling its supposed top priority of improving education.”

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said: “This was a bruising interview for Nicola Sturgeon, because she was faced with the reality of her own appalling record on education.

“After 10 years of SNP government, we have seen nothing but declining education standards and growing class sizes. And now even Nicola Sturgeon isn't denying that reality.

“There's a lost generation of Scottish children who are suffering as a result of the SNP's obsession with another divisive independence referendum.”

Meanwhile, a “damning” report from Holyrood's Education Committee found that schools are struggling to cope with the growing number of children with additional support needs.

One in four pupils now requires extra support as a result of the SNP's policy of inclusion into mainstream school, with numbers up 153 per cent since 2010.

The committee found some children felt more excluded than they might have done in a special school due to a lack of resources, with specialist staff, support services and special school places all down.

Inclusion

Committee convener James Dornan said: “The committee was overwhelmed with the response it got from parents, teachers and those who live and work with children with additional support needs.

“There is still widespread support for the policy of inclusion and we also heard about the positive difference support can make to children.

“But we also heard about what can happen when there is not the staff and support to help those most in need. For example, there is a very real concern that some children feel more excluded in a mainstream school setting than they may have done in a special school.”

Ross Greer MSP, the Scottish Greens' education spokesman, said the education system under the SNP was “failing far too many” pupils. He added: “This is the result of years of staff cuts, including over 500 ASN teachers and hundreds of assistants, as well as teacher training which is wildly inconsistent.

“I've been pushing the Government on this issue for months now and after the damning evidence the education committee has received, they need to get on top of it immediately.”

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Nicola Sturgeon arrives at ITV for an interview by Robert Peston, right

Running country is my top ‘girl job’

By Ben Borland

NICOLA Sturgeon has revealed that her husband does the cooking and cleaning while she “gets on with the girl job of running the country”.

The First Minister's comments were a response to Theresa May's controversial remarks about “girl jobs and boy jobs” in the home, which Ms Sturgeon said risked “playing into gender stereotypes”.

Appearing on ITV's Peston on Sunday programme, she said: “I don't want to get into a ding-dong with the Prime Minister here but I think it's really important. We're all trying to break down gender stereotypes and I've spent a lot of time – and I know Theresa May will agree with this – saying to girls there's nothing off limits, you should aspire to whatever you want to do.

“I think we've got to be careful we don't then just play into these gender stereotypes.”

The Prime Minister appeared

Nicola Sturgeon with her husband Peter Murrell, who she says does ‘most domestic tasks’. Inset above, Philip and Theresa May on The One Show

membership later, she said: “It may be by necessity, even if we didn't want that.”

Jackson Carlaw, the Scottish Conservative deputy leader, said the remarks demonstrated that Ms Sturgeon's position on Europe had “descended into complete chaos”.

He said: “She claims we must have a referendum on independence because we're

leaving the EU. Now, in a cynical attempt to win back Leave voters who have deserted the SNP, she refuses to say whether an independent Scotland would go back in.

“And her flirtation with EFTA would leave us with all the obligations but no voice in decision-making.

“Nobody is going to be fooled by these political games.”

Tories unveil plans to put hard-working Britons and their families first



Tory leader Theresa May

FROM PAGE ONE

be the greatest extension of employee protections ever introduced by a Conservative government.

The proposals also include a legal right for parents to take time off if they suffer the tragedy of losing a child.

The package she is proposing, if she wins the General Election on June 8, underlines her determination to strike deep into traditional Labour territory.

She will characterise it as keeping her promise when she became Prime Minister to ensure prosperity is more fairly shared by ordinary families.

She is promising to maintain EU-guaranteed worker rights as well as offering new ones.

There is also a new commitment on National Living Wage rises and steps to prevent a repeat of Sir Philip Green's BHS pensions scandal.

Mrs May publishes the deal on the eve of tomorrow's launch of Labour's

manifesto and ahead of the Conservatives' own programme for government which is also due this week.

Opinion polls yesterday showed Mrs May maintains her huge lead over Labour with an Opinion survey putting the Tories on 47 per cent and Labour on 32.

One expert forecast that she could outdo former premier Margaret Thatcher at her peak by securing a Commons majority as big as 172, up from the 17 she inherited from David Cameron last summer and the largest Tory advantage since the 1930s.

The prediction by Professor John Curtice, of Strathclyde University, was based on a poll by Lord Ashcroft.

Lady Thatcher secured a 144-seat majority in 1983 after winning the Falklands War. Tony Blair's 1997 landslide gave Labour a 179-seat majority.

Visiting a training facility in south-east England, Mrs May is expected

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to declare: “I said I would use Brexit to extend the protections and rights that workers enjoy, and our manifesto will deliver exactly that.

“Our plans, backed up with strong and stable leadership, will be the greatest expansion in workers' rights by any Conservative government in history.

“By working with business, reducing

‘It will be the greatest expansion in workers’ rights by any Tory government in history’

taxes and dealing with the deficit we have delivered steady improvements to the economic prospects of working people.

“Now is the time to lock in that economic growth and ensure the proceeds

are spread to everyone in our country. There is only one leader at this election who will put rights and opportunities for ordinary working families first.

“The choice next month is clear – economic stability and a better deal for workers under my Conservative team, or chaos under Jeremy Corbyn, whose nonsensical policies would trash the economy and destroy jobs.”

Currently, workers have the right to time off for family emergencies such as illness or childcare problems but not to deal with longer-term concerns such as frail relatives.

Mrs May also proposes high quality “returnships” to ease people back into work after, for example, having children or caring for family.

People suffering from fluctuating mental health conditions such as depression would be protected from discrimination under reforms to the Equalities Act, which currently covers only constant conditions.

The National Living Wage would continue to rise in line with median

earnings until 2022, two years beyond the 2020 promised earlier.

Mrs May will also promise to enact recommendations due this summer from a review of modern employment practices, including the insecure freelance “gig” economy.

Workers' rights to unpaid leave for training would be extended. In moves that could give employees more power in their companies, listed firms would have to create “stakeholder advisory panels”, make an existing non-executive director an employee representative or directly appoint a worker representative to their board. The Government would also consult over giving workers similar rights to those of shareholders to information about the company.

The Tories promise new powers for the pensions watchdog and fund trustees to guard against “irresponsible” behaviour by company bosses, including letting the regulator inspect takeovers that might impact on pensions.

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LET ME SHINE AS ‘RONSEAL’ PM WHO FOLLOWS UP ON PROMISES, SAYS MAY

THERESA May has urged voters to see her as the “Ronseal” leader who can be trusted to do what she promises.

In an interview, the Prime Minister eagerly seized on an unnamed minister's comparison between her and the wood stain, paint and preservative brand known for its “does exactly what it says on the tin” advertising slogan.

Asked about the comment, she said: “Certainly, that's my political philosophy.

“I try to say it as it is and would hope that what people see is what they get. What it

says on the tin is what they get.”

Referencing the popular DIY product is also in keeping with Mrs May's frequent habit of highlighting her belief in hard work and public service as an antidote to criticism of her awkward style.

However, she might face questions about her understanding of ordinary families by revealing she had not watched the hugely popular TV police dramas Broadchurch or Line of Duty, although she has seen Sherlock and Midsomer Murders.



David Davis

By Alison Little
Deputy Political Editor

BREXIT Secretary David Davis yesterday set the scene for a summer of “rows” with Brussels over the timetabling of exit talks and settling citizens' rights.

He said the UK would stick to its argument that future trade and other links with the EU must be discussed alongside the settlement of any UK “divorce” bill.

Chief EU Commission negotiator Michel Barnier said there must be good progress on the UK's exit fee, the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and Britons on the Continent, and the future border between Ireland and Northern Ireland before anything else can be discussed.

Mr Davis told ITV's Peston on Sunday that Article 50 of the EU treaties “says you'll decide what is now called the divorce arrangement, the separation, taking into account the ongoing relationship. How can you take into account the ongoing relationship which doesn't exist yet?”

He said Brussels was putting pressure on the UK by insisting on dealing with “the most difficult bit, the funding and Northern Ireland, before anything else”.

“How on earth do you resolve the issue of the border with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland unless you know what our general borders policy is, what the customs agreement is, what the free trade agreement is, whether you need to charge tariffs at the border?”

“It's wholly illogical... so that will be the row of the summer.”

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